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Unlock the doors to Cape Wind debate

What does an Alaskan congressman care about a controversial wind farm proposal off the shores of Cape Cod?

Surely this is the question most of you have for U.S. Rep. Don Young, who attached a rider to a \$8.7 billion Coast Guard bill currently being discussed in a House-Senate conference committee. Young, who is chairman of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, put his stamp on an issue so volatile that

even the Bay State's junior senator, John Kerry, has not revealed where he stands. At least not publicly.

The Young amendment would ban wind farms within 1.5 miles of shipping or ferry lanes, effectively killing a plan to build 130 turbines in Nantucket Sound. The measure could reach a vote as soon as this week.

This is legislation you would expect from a member of the Bay State delegation, particularly U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy or U.S. Rep. William Delahunt, both of whom oppose the project. Although Young is the third-ranking Republican House member, he made a name for himself over three decades as a fierce defender of interests exclusive to Alaska.

So why would he surface as a pivotal player in a story 4,500 miles from his district? A good question. And you still don't know the answer because Young doesn't think you

deserve an answer.

Times reporters started calling Young's office in Washington, D.C., shortly after learning about the amendment in December, phoning more than a dozen times before the story was scheduled to be published last week. When neither Young nor his spokesman would call back, staff

writer Kevin Dennehy was sent to Washington.

Young avoided speaking with Dennehy for two days. On the second day, his spokesman offered a vague and brief comment

when it was clear the reporter wasn't leaving the office until he did.

Possibly at the same time in the next room, a private letter was being drafted in which Young urged colleagues to support his legislation. "Nothing shows the need for my navigational safety standards amendment better than the proposed Cape Wind project," he wrote. The letter was dated Feb. 15, the day Dennehy waited in Young's office.

The notion of strict navigational safety standards make sense, so it is unfortunate that Young went underground with this amendment and it is a shame he refused to offer any explanation to the residents of Cape Cod and the Islands.

We deserve better.

The wind farm developer, Cape Wind Associates, would like to pitch this as an example of opponents resorting to sneaky and unfair tactics, but there's plenty Cape Wind

is keeping quiet as well. The developer refuses to reveal any detailed financial information and employs former House Majority Leader Dick Armey's powerful firm Piper Rudnick to represent their interests with U.S. representatives and senators, though they say the lobbyists are mostly defending the company against legislative maneuvering.

Our democracy is founded on the principle that transparency and healthy debate inevitably lead to good governance and fair decisions, but too many resolutions today are reached in the wee hours of the morning, in Capitol Hill cloak-rooms, through amendments such as Young's.

Wind farm critics have complained about a lack of regulatory framework for renewable energy projects on the Outer Continental Shelf. If they are serious, they can do something about it: Develop an ocean zoning policy and give it a rigorous review and full debate.

That has not happened. Instead, many observers believe the issue will be decided in the back rooms and courtrooms.

Unfortunately, this is how the high-stakes game is being played. The vociferous debate over the proposed Nantucket Sound wind farm has echoed for nearly five years, but the most decisive words are being whispered in Washington, D.C.



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